

A FRESH blow to plans for moving Wycombe Wanderers' Football ground away from Loakes Park, to release urgently-needed land for extensions to Wycombe General Hospital, has been dealt by Bucks County Planning Committee.

They have just turned down for the second time a recommendation by Wycombe Rural Council that the football club should be offered land at Rockalls Farm, Four Ashes, near Hazlemere, as an alternative ground.

The desperate need for more land to extend the hospital leaves Loakes Park as the only possible available land.

At a meeting of Wycombe Rural Council on Monday, members voted to ask the county council to reconsider their first recommendation that use of the Four Ashes land as a football ground should be refused. The rural council is prepared to give permission and feel that, in light of the case put forward by the Hospital Board, Four Ashes is a possible answer.

Alternative

The issue was first raised some years ago, when the club offered to sell the ground subject to an alternative site for a new ground, acceptable to the club, being made available.

The Board wants the football ground so that it can build big extensions to the adjoining hospital. At present the hospital buildings are along two sides of the ground, which is about six acres in extent.

The Board has pointed out that if it cannot extend the hospital over Loakes Park it will be forced to build another hospital outside the town, splitting the hospital services of the area. This would mean additional capital expenditure and running costs, and duplicating some staff.

The club's agreement to give up the ground — its home since early in the century and the gift of Mr. Frank Adams — depends on an alternative suitable ground and the Board paying a reasonable price for the land.

And that price could probably be not less than £1,000,000, for in addition to the market price of the land at Loakes Park—in the region of £500,000 as building land — the club would expect enough money to provide proper facilities on its new ground.

With the planning com-

mittee's second and, it seems final decision not to agree with the rural council's wishes, plans for the extension are still wishful thinking.

A county council spokesman told the 'Free Press': "The committee members are in fact very sympathetic and have instructed their officers to look for another site. There will be meetings between the two councils and we hope they can find a compromise solution which they can put to the applicants."

Comprehensive

But the view of club chairman Mr. Jack Smethurst was: "We don't want to move from Loakes Park if we can help it." During previous talks with local planning authorities the club has indicated that it would need a level site of from 15 to 20 acres.

Its outline planning application for Rockalls Farm was made after technical officers of the rural council met to consider whether or not the hospital's requirements should be met

at Loakes Park or sited elsewhere.

They reported that because of the capital already invested in the hospital and the high additional capital needed for a second site, the hospital would have to be developed on its present site if a properly balanced and fully comprehensive district hospital service was to be provided.

But they accepted that a football club was an important asset to the town and that it was essential that satisfactory alternative accommodation should be offered to it.

Although the Board is not immediately ready to start building extensions to the hospital, it needs to know whether the Loakes Park site will be available so that it can plan ahead.

Another recent alternative put forward by the football club, if Rockalls Farm were turned down, is a site on the opposite side of the M40 motorway at Handy Cross. The county council is being asked for its views on an application by the club for that site — which is, however, in the Green Belt.